

School policies struggle with invasive technology

The rules regarding cellphone use vary from school to school, but the risks and stakes are high given the ease with which information can be transmitted online, reports **EMILY RAUHALA**.

Note-passing in class is an age-old art: Put a textbook on your desk to block the teacher's view, duck, write, and pass. If the teacher sees you, eat the paper.

But, web-enabled cellphones are putting a new spin on the old practice. Armed with the phones, students can send text messages, listen to music, browse the Internet, take pictures or shoot video with palm-sized phones. And, as technology changes, schools must adapt.

There is no single policy on cellphone use in Ottawa's schools. As things stand, policies vary board to board, school to school.

A student in the English Catholic board, for instance, can bring a phone to school, but can't use it on school property. If you attend an English public school, your principal decides.

Every principal, it seems, has a slightly different set of rules and a slightly different set of consequences.

At John McCrae Secondary, students can use phones at school, but not in class. At Lisgar Collegiate, you've got to step off school property. Some schools confiscate phones, others give a verbal warning.

Kerry Houlahan, of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, said many teachers are concerned about cellphone use at schools, given the ease with which information can be transmitted and dis-



EMILY RAUHALA, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Page Halpin, attending Grade 12 at Notre Dame Catholic High School, values his music. And you never know when a sick relative could take a turn for the worse.

tributed online.

Text messaging can be disruptive, she said, but the real risk is web-enabled phones, which can be used to invade privacy if students post information, pictures, audio or video on the Internet.

Although students have always passed letters in class, digital notes aren't as readily destroyed. Digital messages — whether text, audio or visual — can spread rapidly, eliminating the hope of tearing the message in two and tossing it in the trash.

The risks, and the stakes, are high. Last fall, students at Ecole secondaire Mont-Bleu reportedly provoked a teacher and then recorded the scene on YouTube, a popular video-

sharing website.

In March, Notre Dame secondary banned the use of cellphones on school property after someone posted footage of a teacher and students in their school hallway. Now, if a Notre Dame student is caught using their phone, it is confiscated and taken to the office until a parent stops by to pick it up.

But students say they need their phones, ban or not. They put them on vibrate, tuck them in a pocket or behind a book while they text.

Page Halpin, a Grade 12 student at Notre Dame, said he always brings his phone to school, despite the ban.

"You've got to have a phone," he said. "You need your music, your jams, you need it all."

"And what if your mom is in the hospital and you don't have your phone?"

But, Mr. Halpin conceded, most people aren't using their phones to contact sick relatives. Listening to music, text messaging friends and taking pictures are popular, even with a ban.

Ms. Houlahan said schools need to move beyond cellphone bans and educate students about the long-term consequences of posting pictures or video footage online.

"They need to teach students what happens after they've had their laugh, teach them about the long-term consequences of posting material online."

Outside Notre Dame on a rainy afternoon yesterday, students didn't seem too concerned. They are used to seeing their friends online, whether on Myspace, Facebook or a personal website.

Asked how he would feel if he appeared on YouTube, 17-year-old Gustavo Gonzalez, said he wouldn't mind at all.

"That would be cool," he said. "I'd be famous."

He paused, then smiled.

"As long as I didn't look stupid."



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Parents OK with drinking by teens over 15: study Worry about them starting 'too early'

Jack Aubry

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Most Canadian parents tolerate drinking by their teenage children, with a small number buying alcohol and hosting parties for teens in their homes to control dangerous behaviour, a Health Canada report says.

Completed to gain insights into youth binge drinking, the report found that parents of older teens accept that alcohol is a part of their children's lives and are only concerned about them beginning to drink "too early," which is generally defined as under 15.

The Ekos Research report, which cost \$148,000, said youth and parents are "largely unaware" of the long- and short-term health risks associated with underage binge drinking. It also revealed there is now a sense that "a key transition point" to alcohol actually occurs between the ages of 12 and 14 as youth enter high school.

Calgarian Bev Smith, a mother of four grown children, said parents who facilitate under-age drinking parties, even buying alcohol for teens, are involved in criminal activity that opens them up to lawsuits.

Many parents acknowledged during the focus groups that they had engaged in what can be classified as "binge behaviour" in the past, as youths and as adults, and admitted being "tipsy" in front of their children.

Ms. Smith, the past-president of the Kids First Parent Association of Canada, said parents have to stick by their values even if it makes them unpopular with their children and they encounter hostility from parents obviously choosing to look the other way when teen drinking is taking place.

The report also found that younger and older teens distinguish between two types of drinking behaviours.

"While 'getting drunk' can involve excessive alcohol consumption (more than three drinks), it is still associated with being 'in control'. 'Getting wasted' is often identified with drinking to the point of sickness, to the point of 'getting the spins,' 'passing out,' or 'vomiting'," said the report. "Most participants acknowledge that 'getting wasted' can be a dangerous activity."

The focus groups were held in Toronto, Halifax, Montreal, Trois-Rivières, Winnipeg and Kelowna, B.C., with a total of 61 youths between the ages of 12 and 19 and 31 parents.

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